

# THE ODENSE STATEMENT

OUR ABC FOR EQUITY, EDUCATION AND HEALTH



The 4<sup>th</sup> European conference on  
health promoting schools:

Equity, Education and Health  
7-9 October 2013

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### THE ODENSE STATEMENT: OUR ABC FOR EQUITY, EDUCATION AND HEALTH

The 4<sup>th</sup> European conference on health promoting schools held in Odense, Denmark, 7-9 October 2013, makes the following statement. The voices of young people from four countries working with the conference are included.

#### A. Our principles, values, aims and objectives remain strong

1. Health promoting schools contribute to improving the health and well-being of the European population. School offers a most opportune setting from which to develop children and young people's health-related competences and lifestyles.
2. We re-affirm the core values and principles of promoting health and well-being within the context of school environments across Europe. These are shown in the box below.

<b>Schools for Health in Europe (SHE) core values</b>
<b>Equity</b> Equal access for all to education and health
<b>Sustainability</b> Health, education and development are linked, with activities and programmes implemented in a systematic way over a prolonged period
<b>Inclusion</b> Diversity is celebrated; schools are communities of learning in which all feel trusted and respected
<b>Empowerment</b> All members of the school community are actively involved
<b>Democracy</b> Health promoting schools are based on democratic values
<b>SHE pillars</b>
<b>Whole school approach to health</b> Health education in the classroom is combined with development of school policies, the school environment, life competencies and involving the whole school community
<b>Participation</b> A sense of ownership exists among students, staff and parents
<b>School quality</b> Health promoting schools create better teaching and learning processes and outcomes, with healthy pupils learning better and healthy staff working better
<b>Evidence</b> New approaches and practices based on existing and emerging research are developed
<b>School and community</b> Schools are seen as active agents for community development

3. Health promoting schools help countries in the European Region realize the aims and objectives of the WHO policy framework for health and well-being in Europe, Health 2020, and the EU2020 strategy for inclusive and sustainable growth.
4. Health promoting schools are an important part of the "health in all policies" approach encapsulated in the WHO Helsinki Statement 2013.
5. Economic, social and other circumstances have changed significantly in most European countries and communities in the period since the Vilnius Declaration on Health Promoting Schools (2009). We recognize the impacts of these changes and the need to develop and improve health promoting schools' processes and engagement in contributing to meeting current and future generations' societal needs.
6. We re-affirm the importance of demonstrating multiple benefits for all involved, particularly for those in education and related child and social sectors.

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7. Health promoting schools contribute to schools achieving their main goals – the provision of good education with clear standards and fewer dropouts.
8. We therefore re-commit to extending and strengthening relevant research, tools, networks, processes and skills to enable further development and implementation of health promoting schools between 2014 and 2020.

### ***The young people say ...***

*“What is health? Health is:*

- *a lot more than just exercising and healthy eating*
- *when there is a balance between body and mind*
- *about being positive.”*

## **B. Health promoting schools offer benefits**

Health promoting schools offer:

1. concrete and well-evaluated examples of effective links between education and health that support “health in all policies” in the European Region;
2. a context from which to connect with other health and well-being initiatives;
3. opportunities to make the healthy choice the easy choice for schools, students and staff;
4. support to education’s contribution to sustainability – the health of the people goes with the health of societies and of the planet;
5. improvements in teachers’ health and well-being by making the school a health promoting workplace;
6. a positive and broad view of health that includes physical, mental, emotional, social and spiritual well-being;
7. stimulation to schools’ role in community development;
8. gains in students’ health, well-being, learning and competence development;
9. a comprehensive approach conducive to increasing students’ knowledge, skills and action competencies around health;
10. opportunities to involve and work with parents and the community to increase sustainability of programmes and activities;
11. strengthened links with school health services in promoting school health; and
12. an integrated, whole-school approach to relevant health topics, including:
  - bullying and violence reduction
  - mental health promotion
  - sexual health, sexual rights and responsibility
  - healthy eating and physical activity
  - problem solving and conflict resolution
  - health literacy.

### ***The young people say ...***

*“The ideal health promoting school needs to:*

- *be inspiring and welcoming for the students*
- *have good conditions regarding fresh air and outdoor activities*
- *be more aware of the mental health of students.”*

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### **C. To make further progress, we seek ...**

Further progress in the health promoting schools movement will to a large extent be determined by our ability to communicate effectively with key stakeholders and the wider public through a range of outlets, including social media. Efforts will therefore be made to present clear messages on the advantages of being a health promoting school and to make alliances with relevant advocacy movements, such as the tobacco control lobby.

We request the following actions from key players to enable us to develop the benefits of the health promoting school approach.

#### **We ask that schools:**

- focus on all aspects of positive health, including mental health and well-being, and not only physical health;
- take the lead in school development through a health promoting school approach;
- focus on change management and leadership in health promoting schools;
- request school governing bodies and boards to take the lead in health and well-being of students and school staff;
- put health promoting school principles into practice; and
- focus on communication and pathways between schools, parents, communities and health services.

#### **We ask that decision-makers and policy-makers:**

- use the health promoting school approach in realizing “health in all policies” at European, national, regional and local levels;
- combine top-down and bottom-up approaches to promoting health and well-being in schools;
- integrate education and health policies, recognizing that one cannot work without the other;
- develop visionary leadership with an ambition to achieve the best-educated generation; and
- focus on social inclusion of vulnerable children.

#### **We ask that research and evaluation organizations:**

- pursue a joint research agenda for school health promotion from health and education funding sources, focusing on the concept of health and well-being in schools, empirical research and evaluation, and implementation;
- build on the growing body of evidence to promote action;
- integrate health and well-being indicators into education indicators in areas such as literacy, citizenship and participation skills;
- focus on identifying best mechanisms for improving collaboration between health and education sectors, and with other sectors; and
- reflect stakeholder participation as being essential in designing and mapping health promoting school research.

#### **We ask that implementing authorities at national, regional and local level:**

- recognize the vital role municipalities and local authorities play in successful health promoting school development and implementation;
- acknowledge health promoting schools’ contribution to community development;
- invest in capacity-building for all staff, including teachers, non-teaching staff and school management; and
- focus on a life-course approach to health and well-being, integrating pre-school, through school, to work.

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### **We ask that the third sector, civil society and the private sector:**

- work to connect schools and communities;
- apply systems approaches to health promoting schools;
- recognize their growing importance in delivery but also the dangers of “donor fatigue” and impermanence;
- invest in social capital; and
- proactively consider innovative public-private partnerships.

### ***The young people say ...***

*“Action competence in health means that we:*

- *encourage school management to make it a habit for all students to be healthy from the start*
- *encourage school leaders to allocate time and influence on health issues*
- *go for small changes, instead of trying to make a revolution*
- *encourage each other to be healthy.”*